

Christine Luz, *Technopaignia, Formspiele in der griechischen Dichtung. Mnemosyne supplements 324*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010. Pp. xxi, 443. ISBN 9789004189782. \$216.00.

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This book is about literary (essentially poetical) play of a particular kind, dealing with texts in which the effect of the distinct placement of letters constitutes an extra dimension for the reader. Consequently it primarily involves literature that was designed to be read, or texts that were designed to be seen, instead of being performed orally and perceived aurally. Its title is in this respect too modest, as the book not only deals with the few pattern poems known collectively as the *Technopaignia*, but with all kinds of textual enhancement, such as acrostics (*telesticha*, *mesosticha*), anagrams, pangrams, *abcdaria*, palindromes, lipograms, isopsephic lines, and various other kinds of letter play, such as the *plinthides* discussed in the second appendix. The author, therefore, conceives *Technopaignia* as a broad and multifarious category, applying not only to the calligrams of Simias, Dosiadas, ps-Theocritus, and others. In fact, Luz takes her lead from Ausonius, who introduces the term, though by no means the phenomenon. Many of the elements classified as *technopaignia* here may not be entirely new to the average reader of Hellenistic or Imperial poetry, e.g. the acrostics, which have attracted quite some attention. To my knowledge, however, this is the first time that all the relevant material has been collected in a single volume. It must be stressed here that, as the title explains, this book is about Greek poetry only, and little or at any rate only circumstantial Latin material is included.

The volume starts with an introduction to the oxymoronic nature of the term *technopaignion*, in which both the τέχνη- and the παίγνιον-elements are discussed, and in which the dimensions of play, competition, and self-imposed restriction are considered. The following chapters are divided according to the type of play discussed: in each chapter the author presents all the relevant evidence in chronological and typological order, and treats each textual instance separately. Of each poem, fragment, and single line a translation is given in the footnotes; testimonia are included and discussed as far as they are relevant. Several excursus, interspersed within the individual chapters, deal with material that is evidently related (e.g. riddles, encrypted alphabets, encoded messages, numerical play, etymology) and of interest to the reader, but that cannot strictly be labelled *Formspiel*. Each chapter ends with a convenient summary.

The first chapter is devoted to acrostics and gives a clear overview, ranging from the famous name-acrostics of Nicander, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Aratus' metapoetic λεπτή gamma-acrostic, to verse inscriptions and anonymous *abcdarion* acrostics. Each of the twenty some instances is well-documented and I found especially useful the discussion of aspects such as authorial motivation, function (mnemotechnical, aesthetic), typology, the relation to riddles and didactic poetry, and the uses of the convenient yet imprecise σφραγίς-label. As the author shows a keen eye for relevant related material, even if it does not exactly fit into the category, some interesting and less-known texts are included, such as authentic funerary and votive epigrams.

The next chapter deals with *Buchstaben- und Alphabetspiele*, containing instances of verses starting and ending with the same letter, syllable verses (the first and last syllable of a verse make up a single word), alphabet verses (all letters of the alphabet are used at least once), and the tantalizing fourth category of χαλινοί, *Zungenbrechern*, in which all letters of the alphabet are used *only* once. The first category seems to describe a less than remarkable phenomenon, but as the author explains, this kind of play is not only about composition, but part of a sympotic game in which participants are challenged to come up with (Homeric) verses starting and ending with e.g. the alpha. The second category similarly aims at finding accidental instances in earlier poetry, with the restriction that only nouns in the nominative are valid within the game. The third category contains pangrams of the *The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog*-type. Here, of course, we are dealing again with composition, not serendipitous occurrences in Homer. Pangrams such as these must have been showcases or testcases of dexterity. The fourth category treats extensively the few known ‘superpangrams’, in which the author at length details the nature, purpose, context, difficulties, and use of χαλινοί, giving ample background from different perspectives. Following from the largely non-sensical verses of this type is a brief excursus on other Greek-sounding nonsense lines that appear to have functioned as magical words or spells.

The next chapter deals with anagrams, of which few examples survive. What is left is, however, treated thoroughly, as the author again manages to place single words or lines in a broader perspective of literary accomplishment, while focusing on the nature of anagrams, and the possibilities of their original textual context. Luz traces the idea of the μετάθεσις of letters back to Plato’s *Cratylus*, observing the gaps between the first treatment of such a phenomenon, its earliest attestation, and the introduction of the *terminus technicus* by which it has become known. Interesting also is the inclusion of Eustathius’ peculiar thoughts about the relationship between form and meaning of anagrams, viz. the notion that letters must have some intrinsic value and are not merely blank building blocks that make up words. This is again connected to etymology, e.g. in the case of Ἥρα and Ἀήρ, which as an anagram stoically reveals the duality of the goddess.

The following chapter is on a distinct type of anagram, viz. the palindrome, although a second type is also treated, consisting of couplets that can be read backwards word by word, conveying the same meaning while still showing acceptable syntax. Here again the concept of combined restriction (e.g. writing a palindrome shaped as a dactylic hexameter) points primarily at the display of dexterity, but Luz further evaluates different interpretations that add to the merits of the material from a technical *and* a literary point of view. Interestingly, here too a nonsensical line is found that is nevertheless carefully crafted to suit the metre and prosodic restrictions and that sounds perfectly Greek, without having any real meaning. Also included in this chapter are metrical palindromes: lines that either follow the same metrical scheme when read backwards (such as the anacyclic verses of Nicodemus of Heracleia), or yield a new one, e.g. hexameters that turn into sotadeans.

After an excursus on *technopaignia* in ancient magic, the next chapter deals with lipograms, particularly the marked subcategory of the ἄστυμα poems of Lasus of Hermione. Not simply a game of dexterity, the exclusion of the sigma had a practical function in the composition of songs, as sigma’s interfered sonically with the playing of the aulos, and made texts generally less easy to understand in performance. Next follows the treatment of the ἄστυμα technique by Clearchus of Soloi for riddle purposes, and the much more ambitious and extensive effort of Nestor of Laranda to rewrite the complete Iliad as a lipogram.

The chapter on *isopsephy* is the largest in the book, dealing with word-plays based on the use of Greek letters representing numbers; the poet's hidden pleasure lies in the composition of pairs (e.g. two hexameters or an elegiac couplet) that add up to an equal number. A technical restriction lies in the fact that the *stigma* (6), the *qoppa* (90) and the *sampi* (900) can of course not be used in composition. As usual, Luz traces the history of both the term and the phenomenon, starting with Homer (who accidentally wrote some isopsephic lines), but mainly focusing on Leonidas of Alexandria, and Nicodemus and Nico of Pergamum. Beyond these authors, many singular instances are treated; even Strato of Sardes' paederastic corpus yields an instance, as does Suetonius' *Life of Nero*. A short excursus on similar number-plays elsewhere in Greek literature completes the chapter.

The next chapter is devoted to the pattern poems themselves, the six *Technopaignia* proper (axe, wing, egg, syrinx, and the two altars), also known as *carmina figurata*: short poems whose subject matter is expressed in the shape of the poems themselves, showing lines of varying length, to represent a physical layout corresponding to the subject-matter. The author convincingly discusses the nature of these poems, whose shape is not only part of their message, but also an answer to the riddles contained in them.

The final chapter, aptly titled *Ein Kapitel Literaturgeschichte*, sums up the most important common features of all the different expressions headed under the label *technopaignia*: their written nature, their dealings with the alphabet, their meaning, their relation to riddles, the relevance of *paideia*, and playfulness and their practical use. The chapter ends with two sections on the history of the *technopaignia* and their transmission.

The author has written a very welcome volume. It does not contain any new material, nor does it claim to do so, according to the author's purpose, but for those not so familiar with this kind of play, much surprising material is collected here. The playful nature of the *technopaignia* in this book is presented sensibly, in Luz's unpretentious and highly accessible German, and the joy of the multifarious material collected by the author makes this a pleasant book indeed. Moreover, the author is to be praised for not limiting herself to merely collecting funny or amusing bits and pieces, but for discussing thoroughly all the categories and instances. As such the book offers both a systematic collection of the relevant material and a serious study, in which the history of each of the types of play is traced from their first attestations till late antiquity. The author's comments on individual words or even single letters are insightful and detailed. The result is a study that places the *technopaignia* in a cultural, pedagogical and intellectual background, without straying too far from the textual material. What becomes clear is that the diversity in nature of the texts is mirrored by the diversity of purposes, ranging from writing exercises and hidden messages to artful composition, sympotic play, display of *paideia*, and didactic mnemonics. Those who consider such word-plays as found in the *technopaignia* clever but frivolous and shallow will be pleased to see how Luz time and again adds another dimension to the poetical material at hand.

Of course one can always find minor issues. I missed, to my surprise, any mention of the other suggested acrostics in Aratus (παση, μεση, σεμειη, ηχη), and Damschen's unlikely suggestion that Nicander's *Theriaca* was originally in two books: the addition of an initial gamma to the opening acrostic ραφε βητα, which could suggest an intentional marker inserted by the poet. Admittedly, many of these are likely to be accidental, yet their absence in a study on acrostics is remarkable. As they are not treated in the chapter on acrostics, nor listed in the appendix, one gets the impression Luz's has not noticed their discovery, which can hardly be

expected considering her thorough treatment of each phenomenon. I also found it peculiar and somewhat inconvenient that virtually none of the chapters, sections, and subsections are numbered.

But this really cannot discredit the fine work delivered by Luz. The book seems to be edited carefully and I did not notice any errors or typos. This will certainly become a standard work for those interested in *technopaignia* and many related topics. As a monograph it is a handy collection that may not include all scholarship wished for, but certainly a well-balanced selection.

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